

## United States Senate

COMMITTEES:  
ARMED SERVICES  
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND  
TRANSPORTATION  
JUDICIARY  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

June 30, 2020

Commissioner Adam Silver  
National Basketball Association  
645 5th Ave  
New York, NY 10022

Dear Commissioner Silver,

Americans hope the resumption of the NBA season can be another step in an eagerly anticipated return to normalcy, and I would like to wish you, the NBA, and your players success as the league reconvenes for the 2019–20 season. COVID-19 has disrupted the lives of people across the world. Your decision to quickly suspend the NBA season on March 11 displayed leadership and thoughtfulness for the well-being of players and employees.

America's relationship with the Communist People's Republic of China is at a pivotal moment. The squashing of pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, continued human rights abuses against Muslims in Xinjiang and Tibetans, and a lack of transparency regarding the COVID-19 outbreak have become flashpoints. China's foreign minister accused the U.S. of pushing China to the edge of a "new Cold War" in May. Last month, Attorney General Bill Barr stated that China is "stealing the future of the American people" through espionage and theft.

Your league's business interests are closely intertwined with Communist China's estimated \$4 billion NBA market.<sup>1</sup> While the NBA has worked hard to raise awareness of social issues at home, there is concern that the league has turned a blind eye to human rights abuses committed abroad—even bowing down to pressure last year. The actions of the NBA and some players have created an appearance that your league prioritizes profit over principle. This accusation may be inaccurate; however, I urge you to give it careful thought.

The fallout over Houston Rockets' General Manager Daryl Morey's pro-Hong Kong tweet last October was stunning. Many in China called for his firing, and Beijing even attempted to muzzle his voice in a state-run news outlet.<sup>2</sup> The Rockets' owner initially rebuked Morey's comments and only recently admitted, "There was nothing wrong with the tweet." Others like Brooklyn Nets owner Joe Tsai (and Alibaba co-founder) publicly sided with China and characterized Hong Kong protesters as a "separatist movement." All-Star players called Mr. Morey "misinformed" and "not really educated," apologized for his criticism, and proclaimed "we love China." Outspoken championship coaches uncharacteristically claimed ignorance or demurred on the issue.

This correspondence is a reminder of the threat that Communist China poses to democracy and freedom worldwide. First, their officials withheld knowledge of the coronavirus for months before alerting the rest of the world. During December and January, China hoarded personal protective equipment, destroyed test samples, and lied about the risk of human-to-human transmission.<sup>3</sup> Second, China arrested doctors such as Dr. Li Wenliang seeking to warn the public of the virus' deadly nature. China has refused to accept responsibility for their deceitful actions throughout this pandemic and manufactured propaganda to deflect blame.

China recently approved a controversial national security law with harsher sentences against Hong Kong residents who support secession or coordinate with foreign powers. The law is simply a pretext to commit more human rights abuses as China seeks to eradicate Hong Kong's democratic identity. Furthermore, China continues to violate the religious freedom and autonomy of the Tibetan people.


In addition, China continues its inhumane treatment of the Uyghurs, a predominately Muslim ethnic group. According to the State Department, China currently detains 800,000 and possibly more than 2 million Uyghurs and ethnic Kazakhs in Xinjiang for euphemistically described "free hospital treatment for the masses with sick thinking."<sup>4</sup> Residents of these concentration camps endure torture, physical abuse and prolonged detention without trial. China has also implemented a population control campaign involving mandatory intrauterine devices (IUD), sterilization treatments and forced abortions in a barbaric attempt to reduce Uyghur birth rates.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, NBA partner Nike has been linked to factories using Uyghur forced labor.<sup>6</sup>

As the league reconvenes, further details on its relationship with China are imperative. Please provide a written response to the below inquiries by July 21, 2020.

1. What are the anticipated financial consequences of China Central Television's (CCTV) continued ban on the airing of NBA games?
2. Please outline the scope of the NBA's relationship with Chinese state-owned enterprise Alibaba.
3. The NBA reportedly continues to operate a training center Xinjiang, one of the world's worst humanitarian zones. What steps is the NBA taking to shutter this location?

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

  
Marsha Blackburn  
United States Senator

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<sup>1</sup> John Blank. "China Bends Another American Institution to Its Will." The Atlantic. Oct. 10, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/10/nba-victim-china-economic-might/599773/>.

<sup>2</sup> Michelle Toh. "NBA has a new CEO in China. His first task is to make up with Beijing." CNN Business. May 13, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/13/business/nba-china-ceo-daryl-morey/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Will Weissert. "DHS report: China hid virus' severity to hoard supplies." Associated Press. May 4, 2020. <https://apnews.com/bf685dcf52125be54e030834ab7062a8>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of State. "2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: China: Xinjiang." June 24, 2020. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/china-includes-tibet-xinjiang-hong-kong-and-macau/xinjiang/>; Sigal Samuel. "China is Treating Islam Like a Mental Illness." The Atlantic. August 28, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/08/china-pathologizing-ughur-muslims-mental-illness/568525/>.

<sup>5</sup> The Associated Press. "China cuts Uighur births with IUDs, abortion, sterilization." June 30, 2020. <https://apnews.com/269b3de1af34e17c1941a514f78d764c>.

<sup>6</sup> Simina Mistreanu. "Study Links Nike, Adidas And Apple To Forced Uighur Labor." Forbes. Mar. 2, 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/siminamistreanu/2020/03/02/study-links-nike-adidas-and-apple-to-forced-ughur-labor/#325f75991003>.